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UNH Writing Instructor's Memoir Named To Oprah's Summer Reading List

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EDITORS AND REPORTERS: Meredith Hall can be reached at meredith.hall@unh.edu. Requests for copies of "Without a Map" should be directed to Sarah Hatch, Beacon Press, shatch@beacon.org.



Meredith Hall

DURHAM, N.H. - The memoir "Without a Map," written by Meredith Hall, who teaches writing at the University of New Hampshire, has been named to Oprah's summer reading list.

Hall's "[Without a Map](#)" is included on Oprah's Memoirs We Love: 10 Addictive True Stories. Published April 11, 2007, by Beacon Press, the memoir also made the *New York Times* Best-Sellers List.

"When I wrote "Without a Map," I was 55, a new writer. I believed that no one in the world would ever even know that I had written this book. I wrote imagining an audience of one: a kind old crone, leaning in to hear these silenced stories. In that quiet room, I wrote frankly, intimately. But instead of going out into a void, the book has attracted a great deal of attention over these two years. That bold, unguarded story-telling has triggered powerful responses in readers, who are, I think, very hungry for a blueprint - a map - of how we each live a life," Hall says.

"I was initially stunned by that response. Now I feel drawn to that sharing. Hundreds of readers have written to me, thanking me for my book and then - incredibly - sharing with me their own silenced stories of loss and loneliness and love and joy - the human story. This exchange of story, articulated or not, is, I believe, why we read, and why writers must write," she says.

Hall's moving but unsentimental memoir begins in 1965, when she becomes pregnant at 16. Shunned by her insular community of Hampton, N.H., she is then kicked out of the house by her mother. Her father and stepmother, who live in Epping, N.H., reluctantly take her in, hiding her before they finally banish her altogether.

After giving her son up for adoption, Hall wanders recklessly through the Middle East, where she survives by selling her possessions and finally her blood. She returns to New England and stitches together a life that encircles her silenced and invisible grief. When her son is 21, he finds her. Hall learns that he grew up in poverty with an abusive father - in her own father's hometown. Their reunion is tender, turbulent, and ultimately redemptive. Hall's parents never ask for her forgiveness, yet as they age, she offers them her love.

Hall wrote "Without a Map" after winning the \$50,000 Gift of Freedom Award from [A Room of Her Own Foundation](#), which gave her the financial freedom to devote time to her memoir. In an apartment in San Francisco, she says she discovered the drug-like joy of writing.

"We each carry a reservoir of images. We circle them and circle them and circle them throughout our lives to make sense of them. If we turn our gaze to those moments, they emerge as the story of our lives," she says. "I never felt like I was constructing or structuring. The words just fell on the page. For me, it was a matter of just showing up. The stories were very ready to be told."

Hall asks her creative writing students at UNH to make lists of their life stories but cautions them that they are not keeping a personal journal.

"We are writing for a reader and there are clear and powerful obligations. We must be in control of the structure. This must be a process of discovery, and we must have matured into the ability to articulate its meaning," she says. "There must be a larger truth. We shouldn't write until we can contextualize our small stories into that larger truth."

At 44, Hall graduated from Bowdoin College, and wrote her first essay, "Killing Chickens," in 2002. She later earned a master's in writing from UNH. Her other honors include a Pushcart Prize and notable essay recognition in Best American Essays; she was also a finalist for the Rona Jaffe Award. Hall's work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *The Southern Review*, *Five Points*, *Prairie Schooner*, and several anthologies.


A senior lecturer at UNH, Hall teaches graduate-level memoir writing and essay writing at UNH, and is working on a novel and a collection of short stories. More about Hall is available at <http://meredithhall.org/>.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, space-grant and community-engaged university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

PHOTO

A high-resolution photo of Meredith Hall is available for download at http://unhinfo.unh.edu/news/img/meredith_hall.jpg.

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